

like a kitten; the alarm clock stood with feet apart and wore its little gong like a cap on top; and Garnet often felt that the stove was a huge old woman waiting for her to make mistakes, and hissing scornfully when things boiled over.

She hummed softly and her voice sounded strange to her; the house was very quiet. Her father was asleep upstairs, and had been since this morning when he had returned, tired and grimy from the kiln. Her mother and Donald had gone down to the river for a cool breath of air and Jay was milking in the pasture since there was no longer any barn for the cows.

Garnet took an apple pie out of the cake box and wrapped it in waxed paper: it was going to be fun to stay up all night. She didn't intend to sleep for a minute, even though her mother insisted on her taking some blankets along, just in case. At midnight she would heat the coffee, and they would all have a picnic.

Jay came into the kitchen whistling. "I'm going to feed the hogs," said he, and picked up the covered bucket and swung out again. A moment later Garnet heard the pigs screaming like banshees in eagerness and greed.

Garnet had a special little dish tilled with all the best scraps for Timmy; she picked it up and ran out-of-doors toward the pigpen. Timmy had ~own wise and was waiting for her by the railing instead of fighting for food with his rude family. He was a much better looking pig now, since Garnet's care, and grunted with pleasure when he saw her; Garnet hoped he was glad to see her, too, as well as his dinner. She watched him gobble up the scraps, his ears trembling with enthusiasm, and one delicate hoof planted in the middle of the dish.

"When winter comes I'm going to give you cod-liver oil every day," she told him, "and by next summer I bet you'll be a very handsome hog. Maybe you'll win a

ribbon at the fair."

Timmy turned away from the empty dish and lay down in a cool mud puddle with a snore of satisfaction, and Garnet went back to the house.

It seemed queer not to see the old, lopsided barn in ha place. Last week her father and day and Mr. Freebody had torn it apart, and when nothing was left but the framework of the building her father had tied a strong rope to one of the posts and attached the other end to the tractor. Then he had driven the tractor hard till the framework collapsed with a tremendous crash, and the dust lifted in a yellow cloud.

Where the barn's red walls had risen, one now could

Garnet glanced at the clock; it was nearly six, and time to begin supper. She put more wood in the stove and filled the fat kettle with water. Then she went down to the garden with a basket to get some lettuce and cucumbers.

After the frequent rains the garden was fresh and flourishing. The watermelons in their patch were little green whales in a sea of frothy leaves, and the corn on the hillside was like a parade advancing with plumes and banners.

Garnet privately thought that vegetables in flower were as pretty as any garden plants. Okra had a creamy blossom with a dark red center like a hollyhock, the eggplants were studded with purple; gone-to-seed onions were topped with globes of lacy bloom, and each squash vine, vivid as a jungle growth, spread dark leaves above enormous orange flowers.

Garnet knelt to cut lettuces with a knife and laughed when a big toad hopped sulkily away. She got cucumbers, too, and as she started up the hill she met her mother and Donald returning from the river.

Donald's sun-suit was black where he had sat down in

the mud. He carried a little fishing rod over his shoulder, but he had no fish.

"And no wonder," said their mother. "He was so busy pulling up the hook to see if there was anything on it that the fish didn't have time to bite."

"Next time I will take a gun and shoot them dead," said Donald darkly; and he banged and boomed at the top of his lungs all the way up to the house.

After supper day and Garnet said good-bye to their mother, and with their father got into the Ford car which had been in the family since day was a baby; it was very high and narrow and elderly looking. Riding in it was rather like being on a throne, and rather like being in a motor boat. It rattled and chugged along the road at fifteen miles an hour, and sounded as if it were going fifty,

Both the children sat in the front seat with their father; picnic things, blankets and coats were piled in back.

The valley was filled with the blue color of dusk, and lamps in farmhouse windows burned with a clean white light.

There were hundreds of odors in the night air; Garnet raised her nose like a puppy to smell them all. Cabbages decaying richly in gardens made her hold her breath in passing; but the cornfields were wonderful, they had a special smell after dark that you never noticed in the daytime. It didn't smell like corn at all, but strange and spicy like incense in a church. Bouncing bet growing in ditches by the roadside gleamed pale in the dusk, and sent forth a sharp, sweet fragrance.

Garnet felt adventurous and happy. She had never spent a night away from home before, though Jay had been to Milwaukee twice and once to Chicago.

They turned from the highway along a rutted dirt

road. The Ford thumped and jerked and quivered; in back the coffeepot's lid jingled like a tambourine. There were woods on either side of them now, and leaves meeting high above shut out the last of the light. Suddenly the air was close and dark.

Soon they saw the bright flicker of the kiln between trees. "Good!" said their father, "the fire has broken and this will be the last night I'll have to come here."

They stopped at the edge of a clearing and got out. Mr. Freebody's old truck and the Hausers' newer one were parked near by.

The Hauser boys, Cicero and Merle, came running to meet them. Their faces were streaked with ash and they looked tired.

"Gee, we're glad to see you." said Cicero. "It's been mighty hot up here all day. But she's done a good job for us this time."

They got into the truck and called good night.

Garnet stared fascinated at the kiln. The huge oven, open at the top, was crowned with names of white and purple, and the iron door was red-hot, and glowing like the eye of a dragon.

"See, Garnet," explained her father, "when the fire has reached its hottest pitch and the limestone in the oven is thoroughly cooked, the name comes out of the top like that. That's what we mean when we say it's broken through."

Mr. Freebody was sitting on a log reading a paper. He was a small, quiet man with a big, fierce mustache which looked, even when he slept, as though it were awake and keeping watch. His dog, Major, lay dozing at his feet, twitching as he chased imaginary rabbits.

Every ten or fifteen minutes the two men slid open the metal door with a piece of lead pipe; the clanging sound shattered all the dark gathered stillness of the woods. For

a few moments you could look into the brilliant heart of the fire as Mr. Freebody and Mr. Linden, staggering a little, lifted the big logs to feed it.

Garnet was enjoying this. She spread the blankets under a Large chokecherry tree some distance from the fire. She arranged the picnic things, hanging cups on the twigs of a bush, and burying potatoes in hot wood ash raked from the kiln.

Jay was busy too. He helped the men with the logs, and slid open the glowing door for them.

Now and then people from neighboring terms, who had seen the flaming kiln in the woods, came to watch and talk for a while. Henry Jones, the old stonemason, came too. He had lived in the valley for eighty years, and could still remember the boat with big sails that had brought him and his family across the sea from Liverpool. He could remember, too, the wagon drawn by mules in which they had traveled to this valley where his father had settled. His father had taught his trade to Henry, who grew up to be the best stonemason in the county. But now he was very old. He sat on a tree stump half asleep and watched the kiln's bright crown.

"Seems like I've seen a thousand of them things burning in my life," he told Garnet.

By-and-by as it grew late, the people went away and just the four of them were Left. Five, if you counted Major.

Garnet sat on a blanket under the chokecherry tree and watched day and the two men refueling the fire. Beyond this circle of light and sound the woods spread, seeming taller and more wild than in the day. How still it was! And yet not really still at all when she listened closely. There were dozens of sounds: hoots of owls, stirring of leaves, a whippoorwill in some distant swamp who talked and talked as if he could never stop.

And everywhere, overhead, underfoot and in the air beside her, she heard insects making their tiny noises. But all these sounds together made a sort of stillness.

Garnet thought: "I will just lie down for a minute, but I won't go to sleep."

Between feathery branches she watched the stars. Suddenly one of them shot across the sky with a tail of flame; she made a wish on it. And then in spite of herself her eyes closed and she slept.

The loud clattering of the kiln door wakened her. In the silence that followed she sat up and rubbed her eyes and heard the clock in the Blaiseville courthouse miles away ringing the hour. She counted the strikes; there were twelve of them -- clear and perfect on the air. She had never been awake before to hear the clock strike twelve at night!

She got up, put coffee and water in the big pot and climbed the narrow path on the hillside to the top of the kiln. She set the pot on the coals as near the crown of flames as she could get.

When she came down she raked the potatoes out of the ash; they were well roasted now and their coats were black.

Jay had a beard of soot. "Gosh, I'm hungry," he said. "I am, too," agreed Garnet. "I never ate a meal at midnight before." Food should have a special taste at such an hour, she thought.

~When the coffee was done she put it on a paper with the lopsided ham sandwiches. Nobody said much. They just sat in the flickering light and ate everything. There was hardly a crumb left.

When Garnet brought out the apple pie Mr. Freebody pretended to faint.

"More food!" he groaned. "I couldn't touch a mouthfull." But he ate two slices just the same.

Afterwards Garnet settled down under the tree again. grown-up voices about things like politics and the price of feed; Jay, trying not to look sleepy, sat on a log in the firelight pretending to listen as he whittled a stick.

Suddenly Major growled. He had not made a sound all evening, and had behaved very well, only showing a natural anxiety about the ham sandwiches.

But now he stood staring into a dark thicket and growling with the hair rising on his neck. It was an ugly sound.

V. The Stranger

"WHAT do you see, Major?" asked Mr. Freebody.
"What is it, a skunk?"

They all looked towards the shadowy place that Major was watching so intently.

There was a sound then, of leaves stirring and twigs breaking. What could be coming out of these dark woods so late at night? Garnet felt gooseflesh all over her skin, For a minute she wished that she was at home, safe in her own bed.

Major's growl ended in a burst of terrified, defiant barking. He dashed forward and Mr. Freebody sprang to his feet as the bushes parted and someone emerged.

Garnet's racing heart turned over in relief. Why this was only a boy, hardly older than day, and certainly nobody to be afraid of.

"Be quiet, Major," said Mr. Freebody. "Where do you come from, boy?" he asked the newcomer.

There was something the matter with the boy. He walked crookedly and suddenly lurched forward, half falling to the ground.

"Excuse me," he said. Then he looked up at the surprised faces surrounding him and grinned.